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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000470

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [SU](#) [UG](#)
SUBJECT: SUDAN: SPLA CHIEF OF STAFF SAYS HE MIGHT BE
REPLACED

REF: A. A) KHARTOUM 0461
[1](#)B. B) KHARTOUM 468

Classified By: DCM ROBERTO POWERS for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Oyai Deng has had a history of disagreement with Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) President Salva Kiir, and admits that Kiir may replace him. Deng blames Kiir for inaction on problems facing the SPLA, and denies rumors that he is plotting a coup. He admits, however, that the SPLA senior command is riven by suspicion and mistrust. End Summary.

The President and the Chief of Staff

[1](#)2. (C) "Everybody knows that we have had problems," Deng said of his relations with GOSS President Kiir. "We have disagreed on many things. There have even been times when I have had to do things he did not want, which is not good for a military--but it was necessary." Deng spoke to PolOff March 23, amidst speculation that Kiir may replace Deng as chief of staff.

[1](#)3. (C) Deng said he is ready for anything. He was appointed chief of staff by the late Dr. John Garang, Deng recounted. Garang made the appointment after "consultations", but "I don't know if Salva agreed." After Kiir took power, the GOSS president offered Deng an appointment as Minister of SPLA Affairs. "I told him it would be a promotion, and everyone would like to be a minister," Deng recalled, "but I would prefer to stay and help him reorganize the SPLA."

[1](#)4. (C) Kiir let the matter drop for several months but raised it again recently, Deng continued. "I said okay, I could become a minister," Deng said. "I told him that I recommended he appoint someone from within the senior ranks of the army as the new chief of staff. I said it should come from the deputies--someone like James," he continued, referring to Maj. Gen. James Hoth Mai, the SPLA's deputy chief of staff for logistics. The remaining deputy chiefs of staff all have shortcomings, Deng said. Maj. Gen. Isaac Mamur Mette ("Mobutu") is corrupt, Deng said, and was suspended and placed under house arrest March 20 (Ref. A). Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration Maj. Gen. Salva Mathok has also misappropriated funds, Deng claimed. Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Maj. Gen. Bior Ajang "is a good man," Deng added, but cannot "push things."

[1](#)5. (C) "Salva told me that appointing the chief of staff is his prerogative," Deng continued. "I told him I understood that but I was obligated to give him my advice."

Subsequently Deng learned that the president would like to appoint Domminic Diim Deng, a retired SPLA commander now serving in the South Sudan Legislative Assembly (SSLA). Like Kiir, Diim is from Warrap State in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region.

"Diim is from Salva's home area, which is not good," Deng commented. "He has spent most of the last ten years in London and other places. We need someone from within who knows the army." Deng said he has no political ambitions and that he remains reluctant to leave the command of the SPLA and take up the post of Minister of SPLA Affairs (effectively, the GOSS's defence minister). Eighteen months after the GOSS was inaugurated, the portfolio has never been filled.

No Coup

16. (C) Various figures, including two of his four deputy chiefs of staff, have repeated rumors to the president that Deng is plotting a coup, Deng said. He dismissed the rumors as nonsense. The two deputies, Mamur and Mathok, are corrupt and unreliable, Deng stressed. One rumor has it that Deng wants to seize power and hand it to GOSS roads minister Rebecca Garang, wife Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) leader John Garang, who died in July 2005. "I told the president, why would I do that?" Deng said. "Why would anyone take power just to give to someone else?"

Corruption and Inaction

17. (C) Deng also provided an elaborate account of the

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circumstances that led to the arrest of Deputy Chief of Staff for Political and Moral Orientation Maj. Gen. Isaac Mamur Mette ("Mobutu"). Mamur's dismissal was an "administrative", not political matter, Deng claimed. Mamur was given USD \$13 million last year to provide food and other assistance to thousands of members of the former South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) militia who had joined the SPLA. "The troops complained they never saw the food," Deng alleged. When Mamur was asked to provide an accounting of the funds, his report was "rubbish". The SPLA then formed a committee to review the issue and oversee future funding. Unchastened, Mamur signed another contract for USD 20 million for more food, Deng claimed.

18. (C) Deng learned of this contract only when he was summoned to a meeting with President Kiir and the now-jailed GOSS Minister of Finance, Arthur Akuein (Ref. B). At the meeting, which took place about a month ago, Deng complained that the finance ministry was not disbursing funds adequately to the SPLA, creating problems in paying troops and vendors. Akuein defended the ministry's actions, and claimed the SPLA was overspending. As an example, he produced the USD 20 million food contract signed by Mamur. Deng had been complaining about Mamur for months, he alleged. Yet when Deng went to see the President privately, or at night, "I often found him sitting with Mamur." When Akuein showed him the contract, Deng said, he hit the roof. "I cannot continue like this," Deng told the president in front of the finance minister. "If this is the way we are doing business I am ready to resign."

19. (C) Kiir subsequently directed Deng to arrest Mamur and he did so, Deng said. Though Mamur was responsible for other transgressions, including the dispatch of a platoon of 47 soldiers to Uganda for unauthorized training, Deng said that financial misbehavior led to Mamur's arrest. The president had known of these problems "for months" but took no action, Deng complained. Similarly Kiir has dithered over other key issues concerning the reorganization of the SPLA. On some issues, such as the need for national rather than

regionally-based forces, Kiir had come to accept Deng's advice. And though there are still points of friction, Deng's relationship with Kiir "is okay now," Deng said unconvincingly.

Comment

¶10. (C) The relationship between GOSS President Salva Kiir and SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng is clearly very troubled. Though Deng provided only one side of the story, what he says is obviously disturbing. The SPLA is the bedrock of GOSS's authority. The SPLA senior command is currently riven with suspicion and mistrust, and rivalries inside the army echo the ethnic and political divisions of the larger society. The ultimate responsibility for correcting this problem, and forging a professional, inclusive and loyal army, rests with Salva Kiir. We hope he is up to the task.
HUME